INTRODUCTION

The Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study (SRS) was authorized by Congress to determine whether or not the National Park Service (NPS) should have a role in preserving Gullah culture and if so, what that role might be. The enabling legislation for the Special Resource Study was introduced in 1999 by United States Congressman James Clyburn (D-SC) and was authorized in the Interior Appropriations Act of 2000 (see Appendix A). This act directed the NPS to determine the national significance of Gullah culture, as well as the suitability and feasibility of adding various elements of Gullah to the National Park System. The standards are listed in greater detail later in this document. Under the guidelines of this study, the NPS was directed

- to analyze the multi-faceted components of Gullah/Geechee culture using the established criteria for the study of areas for potential inclusion in the National Park System and;
- to evaluate the resources of the Gullah culture (known as Geechee in Georgia and Florida) and cultural landscape for potential national significance and;
- to determine how these resources could be protected, interpreted and used for the benefit of the Gullah/Geechee people and the general public and;
- to make recommendations to Congress based on those criteria.

Special resource studies generally focus on one site or tract of land that is being considered for protection. This study, however, focused on the life ways and traditions of a living culture in the Low Country and Sea Islands, a semi-tropical area that lies along the southeastern coast of the United States. The influence of the ocean on the coastal plain extends about 30 miles inland with the flow of tidewater rivers. Boundary lines of many coastal counties as well as the boundaries of this study, reflect this natural demarcation. Most of the rice plantations, and therefore the largest concentrations of Gullah/Geechee culture, were in the mainland tidal river area.

The study area stretches along the southeastern coast roughly from the Cape Fear River near the North Carolina/South Carolina line to the St. John's River near the Georgia/Florida line and 30 miles inland following estuarine boundaries. The land mass of this area, which is included in the coastal plain and the 79 barrier islands that hug the coast, encompasses approximately 12,315 square miles, nearly the size of the state of Maryland. Counties included in this region are the northeastern Florida counties of Duval and Nassau, the Georgia counties of Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh, the South Carolina Counties of Beaufort, Charleston, Colleton, Georgetown, Horry, and Jasper and the North Carolina counties of Brunswick and New Hanover. Four metropolitan areas are located within this region: Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and Jacksonville, Florida. According to the 2000 census, only 20% of the Low Country population lived in rural areas.

The NPS held community and stakeholder meetings to gather advice and feedback on desired outcomes of the study. These meetings have assisted NPS in developing alternative plans for managing associated cultural and natural resources and creating interpretive and educational programs. The preliminary alternatives were presented at community forums in October and November 2002. Responses from these meetings were incorporated into the four alternatives presented in this document. Summaries of these public comments are in Appendix C.

This report explores four concepts for the future protection, interpretation and management of Gullah/Geechee cultural resources, as well as a fifth null or no action plan. Each of the action alternatives presents viable options for the interpretation of Gullah/Geechee culture. These alternatives are not mutually exclusive and could be adopted in part or *in toto*, if adequate funding is made available. Decisions as to selection of alternatives, management actions, and developments involving the resources of the NPS cannot be made without congressional authorization and further NPS planning.

As previously mentioned, the NPS has sought to determine whether it has a role in the interpretation and preservation of the unique culture and heritage of the Gullah/Geechee people. While the NPS can do a great deal to assist in interpretation of the culture, the preservation of lands may lie largely in the hands of government entities, which regulate property taxes and control real estate development, and the Gullah/Geechee people themselves. As stated later in this document, the Park Service may seek legislation to help more in the preservation effort, to assist Gullah/Geechee communities in making contact with private and/or public funding organizations, to offer training courses to assist them in preservation endeavors, and to make grants to assist communities in these processes.

The data to follow will define that role, describe the national significance of the Gullah/Geechee culture, and outline the suitability and feasibility of including support for Gullah/Geechee culture within the scope of NPS programs and services. The Gullah/Geechee story represents a crucial component of local, regional, and national history. Preserving and interpreting Gullah/Geechee culture and its associated sites is significant to people of all racial, regional, and ethnic backgrounds and is vital to telling the story of American heritage.

Muhlenbergia filipes*, commonly called sweetgrass, principal material used by Gullah/Geechee basketmakers, in bloom at Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, Mt. Pleasant, SC*

METHODOLOGY

The project began with a series of six public meetings held in communities along the southeast coast. The meeting sites originally selected were Jacksonville, Florida; St. Simons Island and Savannah, Georgia; and St. Helena Island, Charleston, and Georgetown in South Carolina. In response to requests from participants, a seventh meeting was held in Little River, South Carolina, a small community which lies on the South Carolina/North Carolina line.

From the outset, project personnel recognized the inadequacy of the usual public meeting procedure for reflecting the concerns of Gullah/Geechee people and communities. For that reason a concerted effort was made to find local sponsors for the meetings. Often these were churches or other community institutions where participants could feel welcome and comfortable.

Typically, a representative from the sponsoring organization gave welcoming remarks. In keeping with Gullah/Geechee custom, clergymen or elders in the audience opened and closed each meeting with prayer. Following the prayer, SRS team members used visual aids to explain the study process and its objectives. All meetings were recorded via audiotape, videotape, court reporter, or combinations of these methods. (See Appendix C). At the request of the transcriptionist, the facilitator of the first meeting suggested that participants speak in English rather than Gullah. His remarks provoked polite but critical response from some of the more outspoken audience members and set the tone for occasional use of the Gullah language during the meeting.

The facilitator of the first meeting spoke lightheartedly of the need to speak in English rather than Gullah for the sake of the meeting transcriptionist. His remarks provoked polite, but critical response from some of the more articulate audience members set the tone for subsequent occasional use of the Gullah language.

The meetings were generally well-attended, and many people expressed their thoughts, feelings, and suggestions. Some discussed the importance of Gullah/Geechee heritage, cooking, music, language and traditions and their significance in the lives of all Low Country residents. Others talked of Gullah artists, writers, musicians, artisans, and craftsmen who have made substantial contributions to the cultural fabric of America and have not received recognition. Many stated that the Gullah people are ready, willing, and able to tell their own story in their own words.

At some of the meetings, especially in Jacksonville, Florida, and Little River, South Carolina, both of which are located near the boundaries of the study area, some of the attendees stood and stated that they had come out of curiosity, not understanding that they themselves were a part of the Gullah/Geechee culture. Some of these people thanked team members for “telling me who I am.” Such comments may be a reflection of assimilation pressures on Gullah/Geechee social identity.

Meeting Transcripts

Project personnel realized early that community meetings were of great importance to the study and thus required more than an impressionistic assessment of the comments. Accurate statistical information was needed to glean the maximum benefit from the remarks made by the more than 100 speakers who attended one or more of the seven community meetings. To this end, verbatim transcripts of each meeting were prepared under contract with local court reporting companies.

Transcripts of meeting tapes were reviewed and edited for accuracy by Alada Shinault-Small, an African-American affiliated with the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston. Shinault-Small is familiar with the people and speech patterns of the study area. She also analyzed sign-in sheets and prepared a demographic summary of those in attendance by gender, community, organizational affiliation, and race ("race" refers to categories commonly understood by the general public and as used in the US census).

A scope of work for a detailed content analysis was prepared in the NPS Southeast Regional Office, and the work was contracted to James K. Dias, PhD, a statistician experienced in the social sciences. The contract was let through a cooperative agreement with the Historic Charleston Foundation.

Transcript Analysis

Meaningful content analysis required an empirical derivation of topics and concepts from a sample of the transcripts. Five College of Charleston students from the Low Country area were selected to assist in this process. This transcription coding team, directed by Shinault-Small, included four female students and one male student, all of whom were African-American and came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Working independently, the students produced a collective master list of key words and concepts in the transcripts. Once this master list of keywords was completed, the final coding list of topics and concepts was derived by post-hoc analysis of consensus among the panelists. Using this completed list, the panel coded all of the transcripts for key concepts. Dr. Dias used the raw coding data produced by the panel, to conduct the statistical content analysis of the transcripts. The content analysis, by its nature, represents frequency of topics and makes no attempt to represent the intensity of sentiments expressed by speakers.

Full results of the analysis of the seven initial community meetings are presented in the final contract report. Most notable results from the study as contained in the executive summary include:

- Only 9% of the speakers identified themselves as specifically affiliated with a Gullah/Geechee organization;
- 66% of the speakers were black.
- The majority of speakers, both white and black, were female;
- Since some individuals attended more than one of the seven meetings, adjustments were made to prevent double-counting of these individuals;

- In the course of their remarks, speakers collectively mentioned some 200 place names, 14 church congregations, and nine traditional customs pertaining to religion.

Of 124 keywords mentioned in the transcripts, the top ten in frequency of mention, by race of speaker, follow in the tables below. Other frequently mentioned topics, especially from African-American speakers, included traditional arts/sweetgrass baskets, oral history, land retention, community empowerment, economic preservation, and cemetery/graveyard accessibility.

Key Topics and Themes, Black Speakers	Frequency of Mention
Individual/Family History	57
Educational Activities [informal and formal]	37
Cultural Preservation	33
Cultural Pride	32
Youth Involvement in Educational Process	29
Rice/Indigo/Gullah Culture/History	27
Area History	26
Unknown Local History	24
Community Involvement	23
Gullah Language	22

Key Topics and Themes, White Speakers	Frequency of Mention
Individual/Family History	13
Rice/Indigo/Gullah Culture/History	12
Area History	11
Cultural Preservation	9
Geographic Sites	8
Educational Activities [informal and formal]	8
Preservation of Culture	7
Community Involvement	6
Unknown local history	5
Architectural Preservation	5

There were no statistically significant differences in key word rankings by meeting location, race, organizational affiliation, or gender. Nonetheless, there were some interesting, if not statistically significant tendencies. For example, Individual/ Family History ranked number one for both white and black speakers. While Educational Activities ranked second with black speakers, it ranked only sixth with white speakers. Conversely, Rice/ Indigo/Gullah Culture/History ranked second with white speakers but only seventh with black speakers. Gullah Language, which ranked tenth with black speakers, did not appear in the top ten for white speakers. (Dias, 2001)

The transcript analyses from the first round of meetings did, however, provide additional community and ethnographic assessments. The specifics of the content analysis became an important factor in the development of alternatives that were responsive to the views expressed by meeting participants. After the transcript analyses were completed, a summary of results was widely disseminated via newsletter. No attempt was made to assess any possible influence this distribution of data might have had on subsequent feedback from Gullah/Geechee people.

It is noteworthy that family history was one of the most frequently mentioned concerns in the first series of Special Resource Study community meetings in 2000. Increasingly, researchers have focused attention on the family and kinship structures of Gullah/Geechee people and the impact of current economic and demographic change.

In addition to the bare statistical results, a detailed examination of meeting transcripts provided important general insights and guidance for subsequent community outreach and ethnographic understanding of Gullah/Geechee communities. Likewise, the specifics of the content analysis became an important factor in the development of alternatives that were responsive to the views expressed by meeting participants. After the transcript analysis was completed, a summary of the results was widely disseminated via newsletter. No attempt was made to assess any

possible influence this distribution of data might have had on subsequent feedback from Gullah/Geechee people.

Small Meetings in Key Counties

Recognizing these drawbacks to open communication, the project team sought to create opportunities for a broader spectrum of Gullah/Geechee people to participate in the process and to express their views and concerns in more comfortable settings. Field workers accomplished this task over a three-year period by making multiple visits to communities within five key counties. The counties chosen for this part of the research were Glynn and McIntosh Counties in Georgia and Beaufort, Charleston, and Georgetown counties in South Carolina. (See details in table to follow)

The principal field investigator for this study was Cynthia H. Porcher, a Low Country native and former community health outreach specialist with more than thirty years experience in the area. Ironically, this study returned her to the sea islands of Beaufort County, South Carolina, the site of her first field research study some 30 years ago. The difference she observed in the cultural landscape of the islands was striking. Three interns provided assistance to the chief fieldworker. They were Alyssa Stewart Lee, graduate student in Planning from Georgia Institute of Technology, and two who were studying cultural anthropology, Jonna Hauser from State University of West Georgia and Kareema Hunter from Georgia State University. Two Mt. Pleasant basketmakers, Vera Manigault and Jeanette Lee, accompanied researchers on some of the trips. The lead field worker and one of the interns were white; the other two interns were of African American descent. (See page 171 for a list of project personnel.)

During the fieldwork phase of the project, community leaders in the key counties accompanied the principal researcher to a large number of culturally significant sites related to Gullah/Geechee culture. The lead researcher conducted a photographic inventory of these sites and collected GIS data in selected areas.

Several speakers at public meetings in 2000 expressed their concerns about the number of outside researchers who have come into Gullah communities to study or write about their culture. Over the years numerous researchers have, in fact, visited these communities and used the acquired information for their own purposes with little or no feedback to the communities involved. Many researchers have never reported their findings in non-academic forums, asked for editorial assistance, or sent copies of their work to those who helped them. As a result, Gullah/Geechee people say they have felt exploited and believe that they should share in any financial gain made from telling their story. Commodification by the tourist industry of baskets, basketmakers, and other elements of the culture may in fact take dollars from the people themselves. (*cf*. Hargrove 1997, 2002)

Special Resource Study field researchers spent a great deal of time building rapport with community leaders. Frequently the lead researcher became involved in local preservation efforts and fundraising activities. Through singing, laughing, worshipping, praying, sharing meals, and talking into the wee hours with Gullah/Geechee people in the key counties, close relationships were developed. Through these relationships, SRS field researchers realized that such experiences were crucial to their understanding of the hopes, fears, and goals of Gullah/Geechee people at the grassroots level, who might not consider attending, much less speaking, at a community meeting. Other field researchers have spent long periods of time in Gullah/Geechee communities and also formed close relationships. However, this level of community involvement with ordinary people is

extremely rare in NPS special resource studies such as this. Unlike some researchers and writers, this research team has made and continues to make a concerted effort to provide feedback about the progress of the study to local Gullah/Geechee communities. This has been accomplished through newsletters, follow-up meetings, personal contact, sharing of photographs, and social interaction. Likewise, an earlier draft of this report was distributed to key individuals in Gullah/Geechee communities as well as to respected external specialists for review and commentary.

Using the standard ethnographic method of participant observation, the lead researcher and her Gullah/Geechee acquaintances began to share stories of their childhoods. The stories were interspersed with comments such as, "YOU did that, too? I thought only WE did that!" These revelations led to a much clearer understanding of the extent of the shared cultural traditions of black and white southerners and helped to foster greater appreciation of the significance of Gullah/Geechee people to American culture. Although the lead researcher interacted with a broad spectrum of Gullah/Geechee people in terms of age, gender, and occupation, there were certain categories of people, such as teenagers and small children, who were underrepresented in her contacts.

One of the most extreme incidents of positive feedback occurred in a small community meeting near Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Following the lead researcher's presentation on SRS progress, an elder from the community asked to see the slide program again. After the meeting, the white-haired lady approached the lead researcher, held both her hands and said, "Write down your name for me 'cause I'm gonna remember you. I'm goin' home and tell my grands about you. You told me about my culture; you told me my history. When I say my prayers tonight, I'm gonna thank God for you." While such expressions of interest in Gullah/Geechee traditions and culture are frequent, some Gullah and Geechee people do not wish to dwell on negative aspects of bygone eras nor pursue history for history's sake. For example, in rural John's Island, South Carolina, SRS researchers talked to some people who wanted to put "all that stuff" behind them. Such sentiments appear to be longstanding on John's Island. When Guy Carawan (1989) lived on the island during the 1960s, he frequently heard comments such as, "Why would we want to dig up the past and talk about slavery, segregation, and all that stuff." People were well below the poverty level, often had poor housing, and did not have access to good medical care. History appeared to be less important to those people who are struggling in the present.

Today on John's Island, poverty is still an issue, but there is growing interest and conscious effort to perpetuate selected elements of Gullah historical heritage. The Senior Citizens' Center sponsors a Gullah Theatre group. Since all presentations are made in the Gullah language, and young people who participate must practice carefully with the elders to be sure they have learned correct pronunciation of their lines. Pride in Gullah heritage and language appears to be spreading among the young people on the island.

Preliminary Alternatives

When the transcript analysis was complete, the Special Resource Study team gathered in Atlanta to brainstorm project alternatives based on community input. Seven draft alternatives were selected. Porcher took these alternatives back into the communities for further comment. Numerous informal meetings were held at churches, community gatherings, private residences, over lunch – any time and place that a group was gathering. Some meetings included Power Point presentations featuring local sites, and discussion of the preliminary alternatives. The process of overall evaluation was difficult

in the beginning, as nearly every community wanted a center of its own. Eventually, however, groups became more willing to take a more detached view and consider the alternatives as a whole. Based on information from these informal meetings, the Special Resource Study team prepared three alternatives that were later presented at a second round of formal community meetings.

Community Meetings: Round Two

A follow-up series of large venue public meetings was held during the fall of 2002. These meetings were held in the same locations as the original meetings in 2000, but were conducted in workshop format rather than as open forums. Each of the suggested alternatives for NPS involvement in Gullah/ Geechee cultural preservation was presented at a separate station in the meeting room. Maps and graphic representations helped to clarify the alternatives.

Richard Sussman of the SRS team answers questions about alternatives at the St. Simons Island meeting.

The SRS team answered questions, discussed and explained alternatives, and answered questions, discussed alternatives, and encouraged every participant to write comments on easel pads provided at each station. SRS staff members were available to record comments for those who were uncomfortable with writing. Participants were urged to share literature from the meetings with church and community organizations. They were also invited to contact team members by telephone, letter, and/or email to make further comments or suggestions. All responses to these suggested preliminary alternatives were considered in the development of the final list of alternatives presented later in this document.

The workshop format of the 2002 meetings did not allow for a transcript analysis comparable to that from the first round of meetings. However, all of the comments received have been recorded and are presented in Appendix D. Reaction to the format of the second round of meetings was mixed. Some participants expressed satisfaction with the individual interpersonal approach, while others said that the workshop format did not allow for sufficient public expression of preferences.

It is important to note that some issues and community concerns brought forth at these meetings fall outside the traditional purview of the NPS. Among these issues are:

- Land retention and zoning issues;
- Property tax rate controls;
- Creating job opportunities at NPS sites within the study area that do not conform to the standard guidelines for employment as defined by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), for which making exceptions are beyond the authority of local park administrators.

- Cemetery access and preservation;
- More readily obtaining National Historic Register status for culturally significant lands whether or not they contain archaeological sites or historic buildings;
- Cemetery access and preservation;
- More readily obtaining National Historic Register status for culturally-significant lands whether or not they contain archaeological sites or historic buildings;
- Routinely permitting Gullah/Geechee basketmakers to harvest raw materials on federal properties;
- Direct sales of Gullah/Geechee crafts on NPS sites.

Perhaps NPS could initiate contacts with other government and private agencies that may be able to offer assistance. Additional information on agencies and programs that may provide help are listed in the section of this document entitled Cultural Resource Preservation Tools and Methods on page 128. Some of these issues may be best dealt with through legislation.

Participants discuss alternatives presented at the St. Simon's Island, GA Gullah/Geechee SRS community meeting, Fall 2002.

Scholarly Overview

Gullah/Geechee people and their culture have been subject to intense academic research by anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and archaeologists for more than 100 years. They may well be the most extensively studied African American population in the United States. From the onset, much of this study has focused on the distinct creole language traditionally spoken by the Gullah people of South Carolina, which is known as Geechee in coastal Georgia. Equally important to this linguistic research are studies of Gullah and Geechee folklore and oral traditions. In addition, there is a longstanding body of research on Gullah/Geechee arts, crafts, music, and religious customs.

For the past several decades, historians and social scientists have devoted increased attention to research on Gullah/Geechee social traditions and community life. More recently, applied researchers from a number of disciplines have examined the effects of multiple economic and social stresses on Gullah/Geechee communities and the psychological and cultural responses of Gullah/Geechee peoples to those stresses. Paralleling the social and cultural research on Gullah/Geechee people is a small but significant body of biomedical, anthropomorphic, and genetic study of the Gullah/Geechee population.

As a result of this extensive scholarly investigation of Gullah language, history, culture, and population genetics, it became quite clear that the Gullah/Geechee people are the most distinctive of all African American populations in the United States. Recognizing the relevance of Gullah/Geechee studies in academic and scientific arenas, the SRS team was careful to ensure that the external academic credibility of the study be maintained as well as seeking to incorporate the grassroots views of the culture by Gullah/Geechee people themselves.

Shortly before this SRS began, the ethnography program of the Southeast Regional Office, NPS, contracted two Gullah-related projects. One of these studies was a broad historic and demographic overview of coastal South Carolina, Georgia, and Northeast Florida. The University of Georgia research team, which conducted the study, was led by an anthropologist, Benjamin Blount, who had several years of research experience on the African American commercial fishermen of Georgia (Blount 2000). Results of the project served as an initial foundation for tracking population change in the Gullah/Geechee region. The other project was an annotated bibliography prepared by an independent researcher, Roslyn Saunders of Georgetown, South Carolina. The Saunders bibliography is presented in Appendix D.

Near the beginning of the SRS, the late William S. Pollitzer, professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina, published his authoritative synthesis of Gullah history, culture, and population biology, The Gullah People and Their African Heritage (1999). Pollitzer's book won the 2000 George Mooney prize from the Southern Anthropological Society and the John B. Cowelti Award from the American Culture Association. His work brought together a vast body of research that traced the origins of Gullah/Geechee people to West and Central Africa and detailed their distinctiveness as a population group.

The historical scope of Pollitzer's study began with the period of slave importation and continued through the 20th Century. He discusses the demographic and economic pressure placed on the culture by rapid coastal economic development and points out that the very survival of the Gullah/Geechee as a people is at risk.

Pollitzer's work demonstrates that the Gullah/Geechee people are a distinctive biological population with less European admixture than other African Americans. He further demonstrates how the Gullah/Geechee people show greater continuity with African and Afro-Caribbean languages and cultures than do most other United States African American groups. Pollitzer prepared a condensation of this monumental work on the Gullah people for inclusion in this study. The condensed work is included here as Appendix B by permission of the publisher and may not be further reproduced from this report.

Despite his wide-ranging synthesis of published studies, Pollitzer did not claim his work to be an exhaustive search of scholarly literature. There is limited coverage of very recent publications and of unpublished theses and dissertations. To compensate for this limitation, the Special Resource Study team commissioned a survey of Gullah/Geechee literature. This study, contracted through the Historic Charleston Foundation, was conducted by Melissa D. Hargrove, a University of Tennessee doctoral student in cultural anthropology, who has been conducting ethnographic research in various Gullah/Geechee communities since 1997. Beginning with Saunders' annotated bibliography (Appendix C). Hargrove synthesized the results of many documents, both published and unpublished.

Prominent researchers of Gullah culture, including Pollitzer himself, reviewed Hargrove's draft report. The resulting revised report is included here as Appendix B. This document reaffirms the distinctiveness of Gullah language, people, and culture, while providing an introduction to the current cultural stress faced by the Gullah/Geechee people. In addition to the work by Saunders and Hargrove, members of the SRS research team, particularly the principal researcher, did considerable library and Internet research on pertinent topics.

Ce Ce Williams of McClellanville, SC, uses one of his handmade nets to demonstrate traditional shrimp casting, Charleston County, SC